

multitude of instances, it becomes even impossible to decide whether the wound which the surgeon is called upon to examine, is absolutely mortal.

We have thus far endeavoured to lay before our readers a comprehensive view of Dr. Beck's sentiments on wounds, and it may be proper for us to pause in this place before we take leave of the subject. Medical witnesses are often called into a Court of Justice, for the sole object of extorting from them opinions tending to lay obstacles in the elucidation of truth, whereby a guilty prisoner may escape a merited punishment, and vice-versâ. We do not deem it a satisfactory answer to say with Mr. Hobbs, when asked whether the wounds in question are mortal or not, that *there never was a wound but it might prove mortal*. If the science of the Physician did not extend beyond ordinary conjectures, there would certainly be but few individuals who would place in his testimony that confidence which a Surgeon is competent to expect from a Jury. It is however, extremely difficult, and writers have considered it impossible, to lay down a general rule, with respect to the mortality of wounds, which would not admit of exceptions in particular cases; and although it cannot be determined how far nature and art can operate, yet, physiological science furnishes us with a correct idea of the conditions necessary for the support of life: and it is from a knowledge of them that the Physician can deduce certain data beyond which life is not expected to be maintained. Hence the division introduced by Dr. Beck, of dangerous and mortal wounds, appears the most judicious, as it tends to establish the distinction which is the subject of these inquiries. Medical science is now enriched with such valuable observations, that the practitioner is, or ought to be, acquainted with the different circumstances capable of imparting a deadly condition to a wound apparently harmless; and in all such cases, death can only be considered a secondary effect of the violence offered.